

Life on the Highway

By Dana Alexander Nolfé (Originally published on the WJAR - Channel 10 web site)

June 15, 2006 - Eisenhower and the interstate system

Anyone born after June 29, 1956 probably takes the interstate system for granted. I know I do. I can't even imagine not growing up near I-495 in New York or traveling into Providence on I-95 every morning. It is a system of uniform interconnected high speed roadways that allows us to get where we are going without ever having to consider the road itself at all.

We all really should thank President Dwight David Eisenhower for creating this network because he is the one who signed the Interstate Highway Bill without any pomp or circumstance from his hospital bed. He was recuperating from surgery but wanted to keep working and that's how the interstate system was born.

Over the years the interstate has become a symbol of American freedom allowing trips to the beach, visits to grandma's house or simply a better way to get to the office. But the first thoughts of this system again go back to Eisenhower, who as a young Lieutenant Colonel in the US Army joined a military convoy that set out on the first coast to coast motorized convoy creating the largest "truck train" in the world. Traveling for 62 days, more than 300 men drove, pushed or pulled their 81 vehicles from Washington DC along the Lincoln Highway to San Francisco. In the process they destroyed 88 bridges that simply crumbled under the weight of their convoy.

This experience led Eisenhower to believe that America needed to create a better system of roadways. This was reinforced during WW II when as the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe he drove the German autobahns and saw how such a system was a benefit to the lifestyle of the German people. As President, creating a US interstate system became Eisenhower's domestic policy focus.

Today, with the 50th Anniversary of the Interstate just 14 days away I am in San Francisco, California helping to put the finishing touches on the biggest transportation event ever planned by state and federal DOTs. The "Celebrate the Interstate" convoy will make Eisenhower's "return trip" paralleling his original tire tracks but this time using I-80. We will travel through 13 states and hold 18 press events showing how this system of interconnected roadways shapes our lives and is something we cannot take for granted.

Log onto my "Life on the Highway" blog every day and I will take you across the country and share my impressions of how America loves its highways and byways. Along for the ride are President Eisenhower's great grandson, Merrill Eisenhower Atwater, and other notable transportation movers and shakers. You'll meet them (a core group of 40) riding in 20 vehicles including a 1950s Hudson car, trucks, RVs, buses, and more.

Life on the Highway... I'm expecting an excellent adventure!

Dana Alexander Nolfé is the Chief Public Affairs Officer for the Rhode Island Department of Transportation. She is serving as media support and the swing route coordinator for the convoy. She has been the northeast public information officer representative for the "Celebrate the Interstate Convoy" steering committee for nearly two years.

June 16, 2006 - Launch of the convoy

Today is the day we have all been waiting for – the launch of the 50th Anniversary of the Interstate convoy. The end of the road for the original 1919 transcontinental convoy was where we gathered to begin our journey -- at San Francisco's Legion of Honor Park by the marker commemorating the western terminus of the Lincoln Highway.

Merrill Eisenhower Atwater, Ike's great grandson; Andrew Firestone, tire legend Harvey Firestone's great grandson; US Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta and other dignitaries addressed over 100 people who gathered in a clearing that over looked the city and the Golden Gate Bridge to see us off.

Nearly 50 motorcycles and police cars, with the aid of their helicopter and plane, cleared traffic off the local roads and highways for us. It certainly was the first police escort motorcade, or any motorcade, that I have ever been in. People along the sidewalks waved to us. Cars were held on side streets so that like a presidential motorcade, we could get through the city quickly and remain together. This was definitely not your typical commute across the streets of San Francisco. Ralph Garcia, who is driving an American Truckers Association 18-wheeler in the convoy, told me how exciting it is to be a part of this celebration and that his family has a special connection to the Eisenhowers. His grandfather, Ivis Gonzales was a ranger at Normandy Beach that was under the command of then General Eisenhower. Ralph remembers being in his grandfather's house where pictures of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and Eisenhower hung next to each other on a wall in the home. Ralph said that his grandfather always insisted that everyone in "this shrine" should always be respected.



Merrill Eisenhower Atwater and Dana Alexander Nolfe at the pre-launch event for the 50th Anniversary of the Interstate.

Interstate at the National Automobile Museum in Reno, Nevada.

So that your family can have something in common with the Eisenhower's as well I am including the recipe for Mamie's delicious candy. Thanks to the California Department of Transportation and the Kingvale Kitchen for the recipe.

Mamie Eisenhower's Million Dollar Fudge Recipe

Ingredients: 12 ounces semi-sweet chocolate bits 12 ounces German sweet chocolate (chopped) 1 pint marshmallow crème 2 cups chopped walnuts 1 can (12 ounces) evaporated milk 4 1/2 cups sugar 2 tablespoons butter Pinch of salt

In large bowl, combine chocolates, marshmallow crème and walnuts. (Set aside.) In saucepan over

My family has an Eisenhower connection as well. My husband's aunt Vera was President Eisenhower's nurse several times in the VIP ward at Walter Reed Hospital from 1966 – 1968. Aunt Vera once told me that he was a good story teller and a committed soldier. When I told Merrill my story he said that he was glad that we had something in common other than this road trip.

After a quick stop in Kingvale, California's Silicon Valley, to pick up some lunch and a bit of Mamie Eisenhower's Fudge we drove the remaining stretch of the 222 miles to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the

medium heat, combine evaporated milk, sugar, butter, and salt. Bring to boiling, stirring constantly. Continue to cook for 6 to 7 minutes, stirring continuously. Pour the boiling milk mixture over the reserved chocolate and nut mixture. Beat until the chocolate is melted and the fudge is creamy. Pour fudge mixture into a buttered 9" x 13" pan, and let cool at room temperature for a few hours or overnight, before cutting into squares. Store in a tin box or airtight container. Makes about 5 pounds.

Enjoy!

June 17, 2006 - Truck Stop

Traveling 520 miles with just one stop in just one day is not something I think I have done before. And while there was no hoopla for us there was no traffic either, just beautiful scenery: the Truckee River, snowcapped mountain tops, and the deserts of Nevada; the Bonneville Salt Flats, the Great Salt Lake, and the Rockies in Utah.

In between all of these natural wonders was our lunch stop – the TravelCenters of America that is more affectionately known as the TA. The TA in Mill City, NV was a place for us to grab a bite to go, gas up our vehicles, and stretch our legs in just 30 minutes. It was my first trip to a truck stop.

Proving that America is recognizing the importance of the 50th Anniversary of the Interstate was a case stocked with free publications for truckers. The “Trucker’s Connection: For Drivers and Owner-Operators” had a cover story entitled “America Connected – Eisenhower’s Highway Act Turns Fifty” complete with a drawing of General Eisenhower, a tractor Trailer, the Interstate shield, and a CAT scale sign. Inside the story had wonderful period photos and a great history of how we got to where we are today on the nation’s highways.

At the TA I was impressed by all of the things you could purchase. Aside from the obvious like hot dogs, and an infinite selection of beef jerky variations you could also buy CDs, travel TVs, a cappuccino, or a pink pig figurine wearing a pink fur boa. Hmmm... wonder how many of those they sell a year? There was also a full service restaurant, fast food, a casino, and a chapel. Our

Motor Coach Industries (MCI) driver Dave Kane said that he often stops at truck stops to eat and that over the years the variety and food quality has improved. Having a place to attend Sunday services or watch TV in big comfy chairs is just what someone who literally lives on the road needs.

You see, Dave has no permanent residence and hadn’t had one since 1988. As a coach demonstration manager and driver for the last 22 years Dave is on the road 365 days a year and all of his worldly possessions are under the bus in the luggage compartments. “Travel is just my gig,” said Dave. With his office based out of IL he has very little down time criss crossing the country to sell buses and give testimonials at conferences.



The Mill City TA

Driving a group like us across the US is unusual for Dave as most of the time his buses are empty. Dave said clocking 70,000 - 80,000 miles each year is not something he ever expected to do. Working six days a week, even on holidays, doesn’t leave this bachelor much free time. “I’m just not an office person,” said Dave.

June 18, 2006 - Nothing like Western hospitality

There is nothing like Western hospitality and I have my own story to prove it. Today wasn't travel day for the convoy so we had the day to ourselves to rest, catch up on work, or do laundry. I had planned to meet a couple of people for breakfast and tour the city of the day, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Dan McNichol is the author of five books on transportation, the best selling one being about the Big Dig in Boston. Dan is part of the convoy and is driving a gold 1951 Hudson Pacemakers 2-door Coupe that he bought on eBay in 2003. He said he bought it as a "research tool" for a book tour and who can think of a better way to see this country than in a classic automobile?



The boys of breakfast: David, Dan and Merrill with the Hudson.

People stop him all the time when he's with his car. Dan says the most frequent question he gets is, "What year is that?" If they are old enough then they often launch into their own story about a vehicle that had special meaning to them. Proof of this came this morning when a taxi driver who had a passenger in the back seat asked that very same question as we were stopped at a red light on our way to breakfast.

Dan, Merrill Eisenhower Atwater, Ike's grandson, and David Dubov, part of the convoy's advance team and the photography coordinator, and I took a scenic drive through the streets of Salt Lake City. We drove through the downtown business district, by Temple Square where the most important monuments, memorials, and statues of the Church of Later Day Saints are housed, and the State Capitol which is currently undergoing major renovations.

Across the street from the Capitol were a group of four cyclists getting ready to ride up into the mountains. "Where's a good place for breakfast?" I

asked. One of the cyclists responded that Ogie's Café was great and proceeded to give us directions. Nick, the cyclist, then told us that his uncle George ran the place and if we told him that Nick sent us we could put it on his tab.

So, we turned the Hudson around, hit the highway and in about 15 minutes were standing outside the diner. The restaurant that serves breakfast and lunch, was hopping but we found a table in the corner. As the coffee and tea were poured we told the waitress our story and before we knew it George, whose nickname is Ogie, was standing at our table. Turned out Nick had already called him and everything was taken care of for us.

Ogie's Café is a perfect mix of people from all walks of life and incredibly delicious food. I had the veggie omelet that came with hash browns and toast. An unbelievably generous portion was served to me and every bite was delicious.

How random life sometimes is. If we hadn't stopped to ask those cyclists for a recommendation we would never have found the generous people at Ogie's; all proving that there is a happy and generous spirit out there if you only stop and seek it out.



George "Ogie" Marinos in his restaurant, Ogie's cafe

June 19, 2006 - Ride in a big rig

This cross country trip has had a lot of firsts for me. I've been to my first truck stop, my first port of entry and weigh station (for trucks not its passengers), and this is my first time driving across America. This is my first trip to Utah and Wyoming as well. And today was my first ride in a big rig.

Day four was a long driving day – 394 miles from Salt Lake City, UT to Laramie, WY via Rock Springs, WY. To break it up and get the most out of this transportation trek I hitched a ride in a 53-foot long, 102-inch wide, 14-foot tall bright yellow tractor trailer driven by Mearl Royse, who aside from helping us celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Interstate is celebrating his 50th year as a truck driver.

The Mack Truck he's driving, complete with the shiny silver Mack bulldog hood ornament, belongs to the founder of Country Coach Bob Lee who is also on the convoy. Bob's white 1956 Thunderbird and three motorcycle trikes are our cargo, to be taken out and ridden whenever the mood strikes.

From the age of four Mearl tells me he knew he wanted to be a trucker. He said he remembers pretending to drive while playing in his father's truck. He tells me that he started driving, at just barely 17-years-old, before he legally should have, but this was how he made a living and had to drive to do so.

Mearl made his first cross country trip in 1958 hauling a load of cherries in his brand new truck. Unfortunately, that trip was memorable because he broke down in Little America, WY and it took a week to get the spare parts out to him in this remote part of the world. He expects this trip to be a lot smoother than that one.

Riding in the cab of the truck gives you a new respect for truckers. Seeing how big a space a driver needs to make a simple right turn or that he needs a football field of space, 300-feet, to stop when driving just 55 mph makes me as a driver of a small car want to think twice about driving in a trucker's blind spot or braking suddenly. The view out the cab window, however, is unobstructed because you ride so much higher than everyone else and watching the lush green of Utah turn to the scruffy brown of Wyoming was breathtaking.

At 67, Mearl hasn't gotten a ticket in 35 years giving him a safety record he is very proud of. He told me that he has retired three times already but still really enjoys driving. Retired or not he continues to work at his trucking operations and safety consulting company.

"I can't think of a place I wouldn't go back to," said Mearl, and that means a lot coming from a man who has been to all 50 states, five Provinces of Canada, and Mexico.



Mearl Royse in Big Yellow

June 20, 2006 –America’s Road Team

In 1913 Carl Fisher helped create the Lincoln Highway Association to define a direct coast to coast automobile route. The Associations first official act was to create a 12 state route from New York to California and although it wasn’t perfect it was a way to get from one side of the country to the other and it paved the way for America’s transcontinental highway.



The 48.5 foot tall Abraham Lincoln Memorial Monument on I-80.

Today’s 50th Anniversary of the Interstate convoy stopped at Lincoln Summit Rest Area, the highest point at 8,640-feet on US-30 and I-80, that has a wonderful sculptural tribute to the man the Lincoln Highway is named after, President Abraham Lincoln. Rain lightly sprinkled on us and winds whipped around a bit but Lincoln’s head continued to stare down on us as we helped Wyoming celebrate their portion of the road that Eisenhower once traveled in 1919. These two great presidents converge at this spot with one giving freedom to the slaves and the other giving freedom via the interstate. These actions changed America forever for the better.

Two truckers who have seen the Interstate change over the years are David May, 47, and Ralph Garcia, 48, who have been driving the roads for 26 and nearly 27 years respectively. Dave drives for Conway Freight and Ralph drives for ABF Freight Systems and both are considered the cream of the crop because of their safety and driving skills.

Both men are state truck driving champions: Dave four times in New York and Ralph nine times in New Mexico. These competitions test a

driver’s communication skills, knowledge of the industry, driving ability, and safety techniques. Between these two men they have about 3 million miles of accident free driving.

They both are also part of America’s Road Team that is part of the American Trucking Association (ATA). Once every two years the ATA picks 12 drivers out of thousands of applicants to travel around the country and represent the trucking industry. This is a highly coveted post and both men wear their T-shirts proclaiming them as part of this elite team proudly.

Dave and Ralph are driving the Highway Watch truck for the convoy and I was very privileged to ride in it today. Highway Watch provides anti-terrorism and safety training to hundreds of thousands of transportation professionals nationwide and teaches them to recognize unusual behavior and how to report it. Participants are also trained to report crashes, disabled vehicles, and other road hazards.

Dave told me an interesting story of how he went out to dinner with his wife Lynette several months ago and how they discussed how he had gone to the Daytona 500, Boston, and New York for work, but had never gotten the opportunity to go cross country in a truck. “I want to do it just once,” he said. The next day he got an e-mail asking if he could drive the 50th Interstate convoy and now he is “living one of his last driving dreams.” He was also struck by the fact that the four soldiers accompanying the convoy are from the same Fort Eustis company he started his military career at 30 years ago.

Dave and Ralph both say that driving for the convoy is a terrific opportunity but it is only possible because of the great support system they have back home – their families. Dave said that he’s not just a driver, “but part of a trucking family.”

Both are very proud of what they do and happy to help reinforce a positive image for the trucking industry.



Ralph Garcia and David May pose in front of the Highway Watch truck

June 21, 2006 – Convoy receives a hearty welcome to Kansas

Leaving Cheyenne, WY to go 556 miles to Abilene, KS by way of Denver, CO five vehicles diverged from the main convoy route this morning. While the remaining vehicles are headed to Omaha, NE we are en route to celebrate the man who made the Interstate possible, Dwight David Eisenhower.

The Midwest certainly seems to be excited to have us here and we feel the same way about them. Upon crossing the state line in Kansas we passed more than 10 overpasses where people had gathered, hung banners, waved flags and hands, and cheered as we went underneath. What a warm and friendly welcome for a bunch of slightly weary travelers lucky enough to be escorted by the state police and the National Guard through the Sunflower State.

I have been to several events during the course of the convoy where speakers have called the creation of the Interstate system the “eighth wonder of the world.” The way high volume high speed roadways changed the way every American travels certainly began to change in 1956 and continues to change even today.



Kansas helps celebrate the Interstate convoy.

The creation of new roads, the repaving of those that have outlived their surface life, and the constant repair and reinvestment that must go into what already exists is something Departments of Transportation across the country must constantly balance against the needs and desires of the motoring public.

Alan Pisarski, is a national transportation expert who has been riding with the 50th Anniversary of the Interstate convoy since San Francisco. He has been involved with every major transportation study since 1970 and considers himself lucky to work in a field that melds public and private interests, economics, sociology, and technology together. “I love transportation work because I find it absolutely fascinating,” said Alan.

Alan asked me to consider the where our next great transportation productivity enhancements will come from. Were our transportation forefathers, who were developing the plans for an Interstate in the late 1940s and early 1950s, considered crazy to plan roads for motorists who would someday be able to travel comfortably at 75 mph?

In today’s world Alan said, “Why don’t we design a 120 mph highway system? Are we too self satisfied to think not much more can be done?” If the transportation world has evolved from prop planes to jets, and we have moved from small barges to paddle steamers to the cargo carriers of today, where will the next wonder of the transportation world come from? Moving goods and people, on our roads, in half the time it takes them to get to their destinations today should be where we are heading.

Maybe the next time an Interstate anniversary convoy comes through Kansas in the next 50 years, all that those people on the overpasses will see is a blur.

June 22, 2006 - Kansas and a visit to the Eisenhower Library and Museum

The last 24 hours have probably been the most patriotic of my entire life. Kansas has shown me a whole new side to life in America and I am even more proud to be a part of the convoy than I have ever been.

Last night upon arriving in Abilene the streets had only a few people on them and we began to wonder where everybody was. Well, once we made a left into the Eisenhower Center we knew exactly where everyone was. Hundreds of people were gathered on the lawn of Ike's boyhood home, waving flags, eating ice cream, and just enjoying the warm summer evening sitting on lawn chairs. The Abilene City Band was playing patriot songs. It was if I had stepped into a movie set, but this was real life. People took our photos. They came over to shake our hands. It was incredible.



Dan McNichol examines Eisenhower's private collection of westerns.

At the end of the event's speaking program Merrill Eisenhower Atwater got up to speak. There was the President's great-grandson, standing on the porch of the old family home with flags waving in the breeze and children playing on the lawn, and soldiers who had escorted us into town standing nearby and I thought... this is the way life in America is supposed to be. I cannot tell you what a thrill it was to be a part of the 50th Anniversary of the Interstate cross country celebration at that moment.

And today the amazing moments in Abilene continued. After a delicious family-style fried chicken lunch at the historic Brookville Hotel, which deliberately moved closer to the interstate in 1999 to ensure a steady stream of customers, I was privileged to have behind the scenes access to the Eisenhower Library as well as the Museum because of Merrill's generosity.

Linda Smith, the archive specialist took us around the Eisenhower Presidential Library. She took us through locked doors that revealed special items the general public does not normally get to see. Around 25 million pages are kept at the Library and approximately 500 researchers a year arrive at their doorstep to be able to examine original documents for primary source research. Nearly 35 million books make up the collection some of which are classified for national security reasons. There are lots of Mamie's cookbooks, bibles, and the collection of the westerns Ike enjoyed reading in his spare time.

We even got to go into the room where the administration's White House central files are kept as well as the president's personal papers and other important documents. At this point in history all of these papers were considered personal property of the president which makes this collection even more cherished.

After a quick tour of the grounds, his 11-foot bronze statute, and the family home where Ike lived between the ages of 8 and 21 we headed to the Museum for more behind the scenes treasures.

Here the Museum’s curator, Dennis Medina, who has been on the job coincidentally since the day the President died in 1969, began by showing us gifts given by Heads of State to the President in a locked room’s storage drawers. A turquoise peacock desk set from the Shah of Iran. A doll from Princess Grace of Monaco. There were model planes, bookends, and a lot of busts. “Some good and some bad,” said Dennis.

Three hundred dresses of Mamie’s and 400 pairs of her shoes are kept in the “staff only” main storage area. “Imelda Marcos had nothing on Mamie,” quipped Dennis. In comparison are very few items of clothing belonging President in the collection. Every item kept, however, has a file on it containing and informational records.

“Every time I come here I see something said Merrill. Having seen the original for the dime, a portion of an 1,800 piece Meissen floral china set, and paintings by the President I know that not only too, seen something new, but I have experienced something that will truly stay me for my lifetime.



Eisenhower’s White House Central Files dealing with Rhode Island

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Convoy mid-point victory lap on the Kansas Speedway

June 23, 2006 – A mid-point victory lap on NASCAR turf

Today I lived a racecar fan's fantasy. I got to ride in the 50th Anniversary of the Interstate convoy as it made the mid-point victory lap around the Kansas Speedway in Kansas City. While we only went about 30 mph in our MCI bus, it was still fun to pretend that I was Danica Patrick zooming around the 1.5 mile tri-oval bank track.

This joint Kansas and Missouri event expanded the swing route convoy to around 50 vehicles including antique cars, tow trucks, military vehicles, a bio-diesel car fueled by soybeans, and at least 25 additional motorcycles that had followed us over from Abilene. Once out of our vehicles were given unlimited access to the infield Sprint Fan Walk, Autograph Alley, and the Gatorade Victory Lane.

During the speaking program the Kansas and Missouri Directors of their respective Departments of Transportation playfully bickered about who truly had the first portion of the Interstate in the country. Kansas states that it has the first segment of Interstate highway completed in the US. The convoy actually drove over this eight mile stretch this morning en route to the Speedway. Missouri says it has the first contract that was awarded to build the first stretch of Interstate highway. Both states should note, however, that Pennsylvania built a turnpike in 1940. It was later incorporated into the Interstate system.

On any given racing day the track grandstand can seat 82,000 people and expands to hold 150,000 with use of the infield area. The parking area had space for 65,000 vehicles. On a NASCAR weekend the Kansas Speedway becomes the fourth largest city in Kansas.

And how do most of those people get to their NASCAR or Indy Racing League (IRL) destination? Why the Interstate of course.

US Army Staff Sergeant Eric Miller, who is traveling with the convoy, says that he has been a NASCAR fan for a long time. Staff Sergeant Miller typically hops on the Interstate to get to the smaller local races if he wants to watch his favorite driver, Dale Earnhardt, Jr. He said he's a NASCAR fan because, "just the speed alone makes it worth it."

The Kansas Speedway track is the size of eight football fields and while only approximately 20 IRL cars, for example, race on it during any given competition the hundreds of thousands of fans who drive to the actual event or just go over to a friends house to watch it on TV, rely on the Interstate to get them to their destination quickly and safely.

Whether on the track or on the highway safety is the common denominator, and while the average automobile driver doesn't wear a helmet, wearing a safety belt does increase a person's chances of getting to their destination safely. Doing so always makes you a winner and will earn you a checkered flag every time.



Illinois corn, one source of Ethanol.

June 24, 2006 - Ethanol is a fuel for now and the future

This is day nine of the convoy. The days and miles are flying by, and even though we get up very, very early (most days around 5 a.m.) everyone is unbelievably enthusiastic and energetic, even at the morning meetings. I think we all realize that being a part of the 50th Anniversary of the Interstate convoy is a privilege. We have made friends that will hopefully last a lifetime. We share food, swap rooms so that everyone is comfortable, and make sure that everyone has someone to talk to in their moments of need and exhaustion.

In our pursuit of the east coast we left Davenport, Iowa today for Tinley Park, Illinois. A trip of just 180 miles; anything less than 500 miles seems like a breeze now. We stopped in Ottawa, Illinois at the AASHO (American Association of State Highway Officials) Test Road site to recognize the roadway accomplishments that were discovered there and to acknowledge the men who studied pavement and bridge structures by driving trucks with predetermined weights, at set frequencies, between October 1958 and November 1960.

Essentially, approximately 125 vehicles were driven by Army personnel 24 hours a day in eight hour shifts no matter the weather round and round in circles on loop roads. At the peak of this project about 320 Army personnel were driving on six different loop roads over an eight miles stretch. During these tests there were 141 accidents and even two fatalities.

Whether it was to get vehicles around a test loop track or to get the convoy from California to Washington D.C. fuel is an essential element in transportation.

Everyone knows someone who has an, “I ran out of gas” story. Chuck Zimmerman, President of ZimmComm, is ensuring that doesn’t happen to us by representing EPIC, the Ethanol Promotion and Information Council, on the convoy. EPIC is fueling the two-week trip and promoting ethanol along the way. Ethanol is pure ethyl alcohol that would actually be potable if additives weren’t put in it. The ethanol, which comes mostly from corn, is then blended with gas in various percentages. The most popular, E 10, means that one gallon of gas is 90 percent gasoline and 10 percent ethanol. Some cars today are even being built to run on E 85.

Four of the gas stations the convoy will stop at will pump ethanol and every vehicle in it will be able to use it except for the antique ones. “Every car can run on some ethanol up to E 10,” said Chuck.

Ethanol is environmentally friendly and burns cleaner to give off less greenhouse gases. It is a high performance fuel, and it reduces dependence on foreign oil because the source for ethanol is American corn. This renewable product accounts for around three percent of the total US fuel supply today and the goal is to eventually reach 25 percent of the market.

Believe it or not Henry Ford’s 1908 Model T cars were designed to run on pure ethanol. Somewhere along the line the country switched to foreign fuels. As it is with most things we are looking to the past

to find our future. If the Indy Racing League (IRL) can convert all their race cars by 2007 to 100 percent ethanol fuel maybe the rest of the country can consider following suit.

“I think it is a very patriotic thing to do,” said Chuck. “It’s American and it’s good for America.”

June 25, 2006 - Visiting King Tut in Illinois

With our final travel-free day today many of the 50th Anniversary of the Interstate convoy rested, did laundry, or updated the travel itinerary to ensure that we can reach our five remaining stops on time. The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) has been a super host for our time in their state and even took the initiative to plan a few extracurricular activities for us during our brief time off. I took them up on the opportunity to go to The Field Museum in Chicago to see the “Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs” exhibit.

The last time the artifacts of King Tut toured the US was in the late 1970s and after seeing that smaller exhibition with my mother in New York I became instantly hooked on all things Egyptian. I read books and watched documentaries and even tried to learn to read hieroglyphics.



King Tut at The Field Museum

Having a chance to see another Tut exhibit that was even bigger than the last one, this time displaying approximately 130 treasures, including 50 major artifacts from Tut's tomb, was something I wasn't going to pass up. So, I voluntarily got up at 5:30 a.m. on the one day I could sleep in, had breakfast, and caught the 7 a.m. shuttle to the museum with a few other early rising convoy travelers.

To think that everything we saw was between 3,300 and 3,500 years old is mind boggling. One can only imagine what Howard Carter

thought and felt in 1922 when he discovered the treasure laden tomb. I know that I was exhilarated to experience Tut again; seeing pieces that I remembered from the first exhibit as well as experiencing new ones. The detail and craftsmanship are remarkable as is the state of preservation. Gold glinted off nearly every object. The loss of sleep was definitely worth it.

John Bartman, Community Relations Manager for IDOT, was kind enough to be our driver for this excursion and has been a member of the convoy team as well. As part of the Illinois planning committee for the 50th celebration he told the members the he would, “just love to drive the convoy,” and before he knew it he was given that chance.

To get from our hotel in Tinley Park into Chicago we took the Dan Ryan Expressway. The expressway was named for Dan Ryan, Jr., president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners and one of the main catalysts of the entire expressway system in Chicago.

The convergence of this stretch of I-90 and I-94 is the busiest expressway in the country seeing, on average, over a half million vehicles a day. Built in the early 1960s for just 100,000 vehicles, congestion had become Dan Ryan's middle name. For an example, John said, Hong Kong is the only city to handle more cargo than Chicago and that translates into a lot of trucks and other vehicles on the roads.

Starting last month, however, a two part construction project got underway to help alleviate this problem as well as make this stretch of road safer. First the express lanes will be reconstructed and starting next year the local lanes will get the same treatment. Two lanes will be added and that will bring the number of travel lanes up to 12. All this construction will hopefully no longer make the Dan Ryan Expressway the most dangerous stretch of road in Illinois and simultaneously shorten the commuter's travel time from 60 minutes to just 40.

While the Dan Ryan Expressway is made up of two Interstates, Illinois has seven others that can take you into Chicago, three others that take you around the rest of the state, and a new one under construction. Just I-80, the stretch we are traveling on the convoy, is over 163 miles long.

John said that without the Interstate he couldn't live where he lives and get to work and that is true for many people. The Interstate gets us where we need to go: to work, across the country, or even to see a

boy King we remember from our childhood.



Rebuilding Illinois' Dan Ryan Expressway

June 26, 2006 - A need to be bold for the future

Gary Ridley is the Director of the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) and is the chair of the steering committee that planned the 50th Anniversary of the Interstate celebration. I rode with Gary and two other ODOT staffers the 380 miles to South Bend, IN and Akron, OH today in their ODOT logoed minivan. Along with five other coworkers they have been cycling in and out of the convoy so their agency is represented all the way across the country.

Gary
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At the Studebaker National Museum

important thing about planning the convoy was getting the individual states involved. “It was the opportunity to make direct contact with them that benefited Oklahoma the most,” said Gary. “It started as just a birthday party (for the Interstate) but then graduated into what do we do next?” He added that these events bring transportation to a higher level of interest and concern, and should translate into how we find solutions to questions such as how we will pay for the transportation systems of the future. “We can’t just rely on gas and diesel tax anymore,” Gary said. He believes we need look to local, state, federal, or private dollars, or a combination of them all, to keep the Interstate going.

While the Interstate turns 50 years old in three days, Studebaker has 114 years of automotive history behind it. It began with a blacksmith shop, grew to become the world’s largest wagon manufacturer, and was the only manufacturer to successfully shift from horse-drawn to gas powered vehicles.

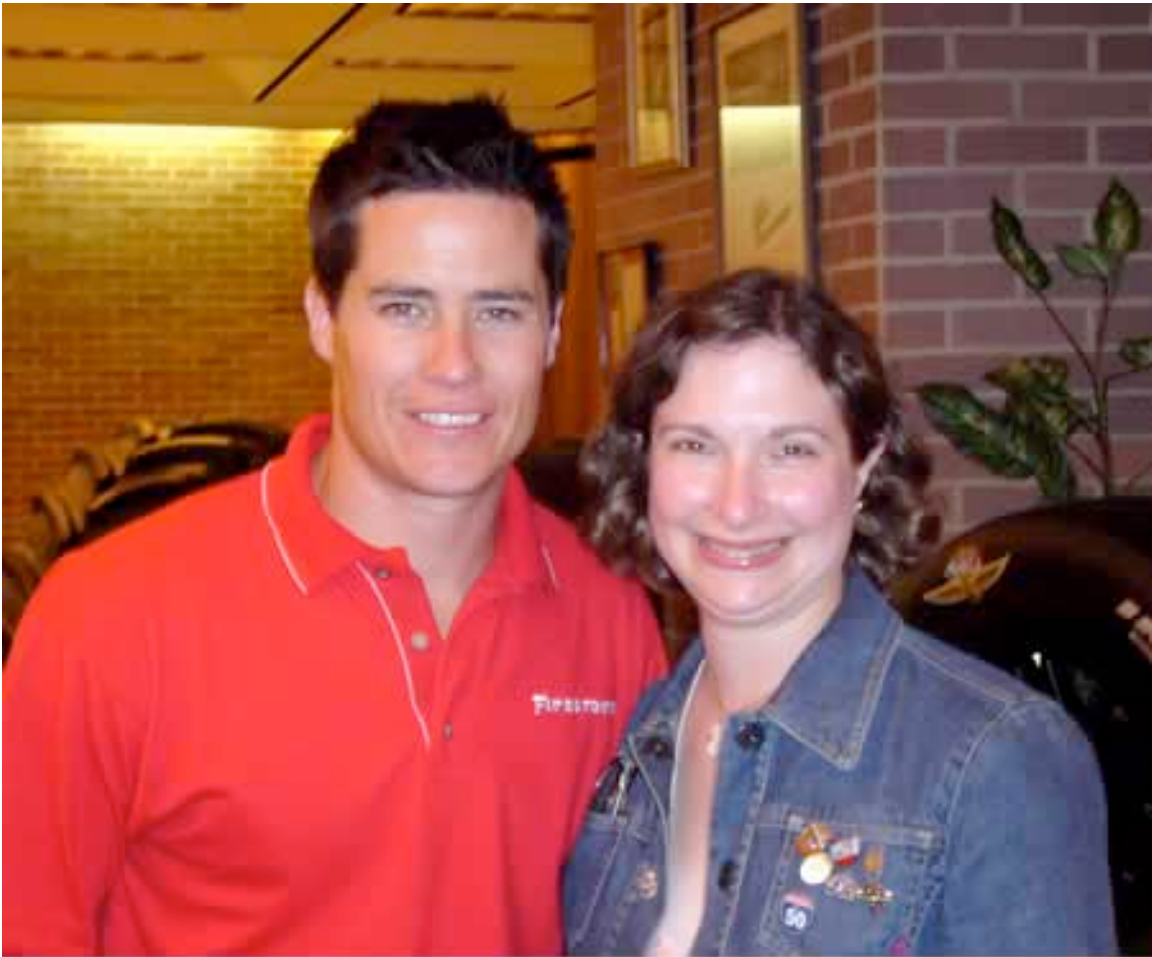
While they ceased production in 1966 the new Studebaker National Museum in South Bend was the perfect backdrop for the Indiana Department of Transportation’s celebratory convoy event. Throngs of people greeted us as we road into town and pulled up in front of this unique showcase of antique vehicles that even has a library that contains photos, factory records, and blueprints.

After their speaking program we were grateful to grab another box lunch and then hit the road. We’d have to hustle to get to our final destination of the day, Akron and the Bridgestone Firestone, North American Tire headquarters. And while some of us missed the Ohio Department of Transportation’s speaking program because of the distance we had to travel we didn’t miss the generous hospitality of Andrew Firestone, Harvey Firestone’s great-grandson and the rest of the Firestone staff.

Just as Harvey Firestone greeted and welcomed the original 1919 convoy with a fried chicken dinner, we found ourselves enjoying the same meal served on Firestone embossed china. This was a welcome respite after a long day of travel.

Gary mentioned to me how the transportation innovators of the past dared to be bold and how today we need to have some of that same vision. The Studebaker brothers, Harvey Firestone, and President Eisenhower all had that bold determination to move transportation into the future and probably never imagined how what they were accomplishing would change the world.

Today’s hybrid vehicles, alternative energy sources, and where the funding for the Interstate’s next 50 years will come from will help shape the road we all travel into the future.



Andrew Firestone and Dana Alexander Nolfie

June 27, 2006 - RVs were designed and built for the interstate

Go RVing! It's not just an industry slogan but it is a way of life for nearly one in 12 US households that own vehicles, according to the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA). There are two main categories of RVs: towables that get pulled behind cars, vans and pick ups, and motorized motor homes.



Bob Lee's Convoy Country Coach

Those who have one of these vehicles average 4,500 miles and 26 days a year on the road. While I got to spend just one day and about 300 miles in one it was a great way to see Ohio and western Pennsylvania.

Bob Lee, founder of Country Coach, started the company with two employees in a garage in 1968 and grew it to a 1,700-plus employee company noted for its manufacturing excellence. Bob let me join him for the day's ride which was my first experience in a motor home.

While the 2006 42-foot custom-built Country Coach

Intrigue is merely a mid-range model for him, they make eight motor lines and the DynoMax chassis, you could have fooled me. With hickory wood cabinets, a heated all tile floor, two plasma TVs, residential appliances, custom color scheme, and king size bed it has all the comforts of home without having to be in the same place every night. It has 525 horsepower, a heavy duty transmission, and is totally electric – most motor homes use propane.

The coach also has four slide-out sections that take it from 102-inches closed to 14-feet wide when it is open. When I hopped on this morning the slides were activated to close them for the day before we hit the road. I felt like I was in an "Indiana Jones" movie because the walls started to close in on me, but just like Indy, they stopped just in time.

"There would have been no reason to have this type of vehicle without the Interstate," said Bob. He decided to be a part of the convoy he said to, "do the little bit I can do to help support it."

With Dick Cloutier at the wheel, we rode the Interstates in the pouring rain; the first real rain of our entire trip. Dave Humphreys, the recently retired president of the RVIA trade association, has known Bob for almost 30 years. Together they have promoted this flexible and convenient way to travel.

"RVs were designed for driving long distances in comfort," said Dave. "They make no sense without the Interstate." Both men said that future improvements to the Interstates will keep their industry thriving and this convoy is important to the nation because it keeps the focus on something we take for granted.

June 28, 2006 - Eisenhower's Gettysburg Farm and Operation Interdependence

I was born when President Johnson was in office so for me any president before Nixon just seemed like a character in a historical novel. All cut and dry dates and facts. Thus, Eisenhower was just some old President you learned about in history class.

Somehow, however, over these last two weeks this man has become a living breathing person to me even if he did die in 1969. I have seen the bed he slept in, paintings he did with his own creative hands, and the books that he read. I have been to his boyhood home in Abilene, KS, his home and farm in Gettysburg, PA, and seen where he is buried back in Abilene. I have met his great-grandson and become his friend. Ike lived in 37 different houses but he and Mamie considered the farm they bought in 1950 their first and only true home. Before the press event there this morning everyone in attendance got to tour the house and grounds. I stood behind Merrill as he went on the tour as well. Along the way he added anecdotes that no one else could.

She

We

gas
“Ike



Eisenhower's Gettysburg Farm

“That’s my Uncle David’s picture over there,” said Merrill. “That’s my mom on the right in that painting. never went anywhere without her teddy bear.”

saw the four-seat powered and Mamie”

monogrammed golf cart parked in the garage that Great Britain’s Winston Churchill and France’s Charles De Gaulle once rode in, but only Merrill could add the fact that,” My Uncle David used to strip the gears on that thing.” Merrill said that he was five the first time he came to the Gettysburg farm. By this time both his great-grandparents had died, but the rest of the family would still visit. He said that his mom once told him that as children when dignitaries would come over they would toss things under the bed to tidy up. We might think of them as Presidential but in reality we are all they same. Who hasn’t tidied up in a hurry and done the same thing?!

With a desire to learn more about this family I asked Merrill to recommend his favorite books on the Eisenhowers – a strange question for me to ask because how many people do you know that have shelves full of books written about them. He said his two favorites are: “At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends” by his great-grandfather Dwight D. Eisenhower, and “General Ike: A Personal Reminiscence” by his grandfather John D. Eisenhower.

At the end of a very long driveway, a simple black enamel mailbox with white letters reads, “250 Eisenhower Farm Lane.” Having the smallest peek up this driveway and into the past has changed my perspective on presidential history forever.



The Operation Interdependence convoy vehicle

Retired Marine Albert Renteria has also been changing history for thousands of soldiers fighting in Iraq. Founder and president of Operation Interdependence organized the packing of 15,000 c-rats on this trip. Over 7,500 of them will be shipped overseas from Washington D.C. tomorrow. A c-rat (originally standing for canned rations, but Albert considers them civilian rations now) is an 8-ounce plastic bag containing sweets, toiletries, and a message from an American. One of the two Firestone tractor trailers that has been driving cross country with the 50th Anniversary of the Interstate is carrying the load.

“Every one has a note,” said Albert. Everyone is different he said and, “It’s like Cracker Jack. You don’t know what’s in it.”

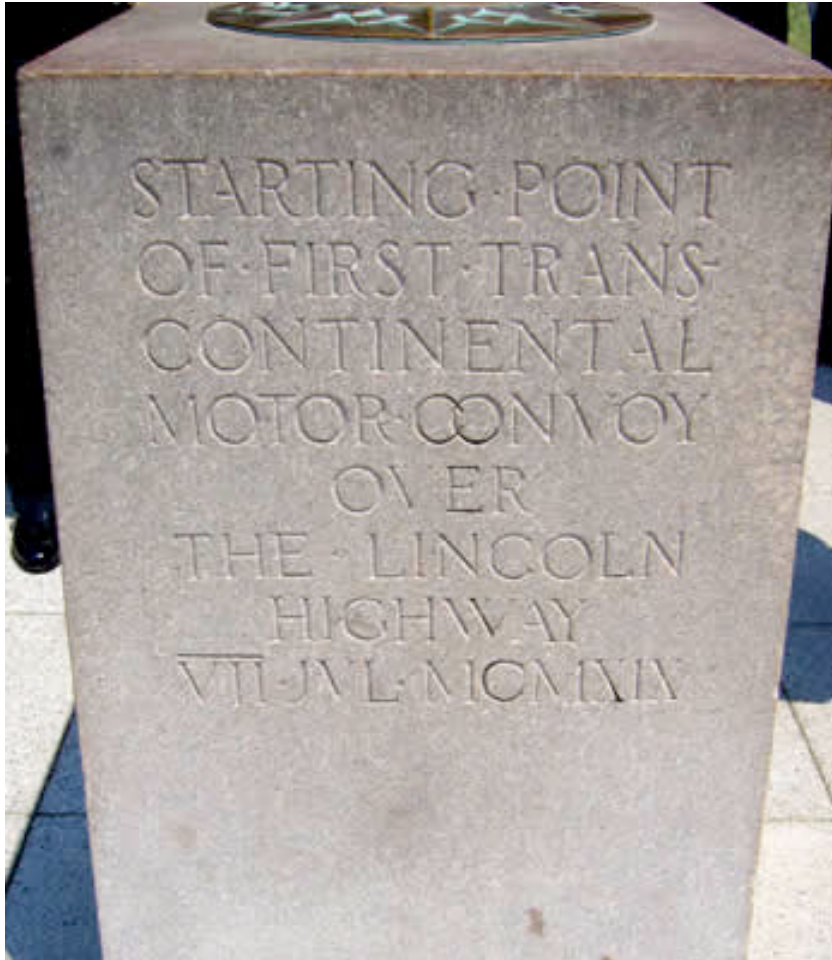
Operation Interdependence has a million volunteers and 14 distribution centers nationwide. “The Interstate is our bloodline. It’s what makes packages get from port to port. Operation Interdependence and the Interstate bring the nation together,” he said.

The four soldiers who have gone coast to coast with us symbolize strength and courage said Albert. All that hard work though just makes Albert smile. A simple e-mail from a soldier in Iraq said it all. It read, “Thank You!”

June 29, 2006 – Convoy's end; the interstate is a symbol of freedom for Americans

Are we there yet? Unbelievably the answer is yes. The 3,000 mile trip two-week trip is over and somehow it seems like we only hit the road yesterday.

If you weren't along for the entire coast to coast ride, and only about 15 or so of us were while the rest of the group cycled in and out, it is hard to understand that we had very little downtime. I packed five magazines and four books and barely made a dent in any of them. Waking hours were filled with naps to make up for the lack of sleep, press events, office phone time, and camaraderie.



The Zero Milestone Marker

The people on the 50th Anniversary of the Interstate convoy were wonderful. Ages, races, and backgrounds all melted away and we became a family. One soldier on the tour who had kept the convoy in line by pulling up the rear as “Army 2” on the road told me this morning that he was going to miss me and the rest of the convoy after today. To this young Army officer we were his fellow road warriors, domino playing pals, and friends. This never would have happened if it were not for the convoy.

An email list was created so that we can all remain in touch. A group photo was taken so that we can remember the names and faces of the people we shared this once in a lifetime experience with. We laughed and hugged each other and couldn't believe that we were strangers just 14 days ago.

Rolling into Washington D.C. this afternoon with a police escort was a

fitting end to the trip. Lights flashed, sirens sounded, and people stopped to see what all the excitement was about. The 2006 convoy eventually ended up at the site where the original convoy left from on July 7, 1919.

The Zero Milestone marker on the Ellipse south of the White House lawn was scorching hot under the summer sun, but we were glad to be there. Dignitaries and convoy members gathered about and photos were taken to mark the occasion.

Today, June 29, 2006, is the 50th anniversary of the signing of the 1956 Federal-aid Highway Act which created the Highway Trust Fund and started the building of our Interstate system. To get from California to DC I traveled through Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia. The convoy that stayed north of Kansas on I-80 also hit Nebraska during its journey.

During the entire trip we never hit an intersection or a stop signal. We were able to maintain a good rate of speed and were statistically safer than if we had traveled on local roads. The entire journey was incident free. All of this was thanks to some concrete, asphalt, and visionary engineers who laid out the Interstate.

The Interstate is a symbol of freedom for Americans, and while it isn't perfect it is our path to the future if we treat it with the care and respect it deserves. So the next time you want to pick up that carton of milk, are expecting that new furniture delivery, or head off to Aunt Betty's house consider what is allowing you to do just that – the Interstate.

Happy 50th Birthday you ribbon of concrete. Enjoy your life on the highway. I know I will. I can't wait to see where the next section of Interstate leads.



The 50th Anniversary of the Interstate Convoy Group